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CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE
RELIGIOUS WORSHIP of the HEATHENS
AS BEARING UNANSWERABLE TESTIMONY
TO THE
PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY.
IN A
LETTER
TO THE
REV. W. VINCENT, D. D.
HEAD MASTER OF WESTMINSTER-SCHOOL.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY JOHN NICHOLS, RED LION-PASSAGE, FLEET-STREET,
AND SOLD BY RIVINGTONS, FAULDER, HATCHARD,
AND CADELL AND DAVIES.

1799.



CONSIDERATIONS, &c.

REVEREND SIR,

I HAVE a great subject before me; of which I believe there is no better judge in this kingdom than yourself: and I have good reason to suppose, from your sincere attachment to the Christian Religion, that you are as much interested as myself in the use I am about to make of it.

From the common forms of school-education, our youth are in danger of returning back from the purity of Christians to the impure manners of Heathens; a very afflicting example of which once fell under my own observation. An amiable youth, of the first fashion, was found to have

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kept

kept loose company very early in life ; from which every bad consequence was to be apprehended. So far there is no rarity in the case : you must have heard many of them : and I should not mention it to you, but for the observation made upon it by his father, which struck me to the heart ; and I determined never to forget it all the days of my life. He accounted for the evil in the following manner : that his son having been accustomed at school to the loose ideas, communicated by Horace and other Heathen poets, had carried their principles into his own practice ; and was therefore only in a train with other young men of his age and education. Good God ! said I to myself, is this the case ? and are we asleep about it ? Do we sit still, and see Christians, under the light of the Gospel, sinking into worse than heathen corruption ? This led me to consider, whether it be not possible to turn this evil into some good, by shewing young men of learning, that, as the false religion of Heathens was borrowed from the true religion of Revelation, and is a witness to its authority, it ought rather to confirm us in the truth than draw us into evil. I thought, if this could be shewn, something might be done toward the preservation of our youth, without breaking in upon the established forms of education : that the attempt would be laudable,

laudable, and merit the thanks of parents who see this matter in a proper light: that no learned teachers, if Christian, could be offended: and that, at all events, he that should give notice of the evil might deliver his own soul by it.

With these thoughts in my head, I sat down to examine the true state of the case: and to you, Sir, or any other gentleman who has gone over the common ground of classical erudition, there will be no difficulty in shewing, not barely that the true Religion and the false have a resemblance in many particulars; but that the resemblance is wonderful and striking, in such a manner as will make the one a proof of the other; and I am convinced others must have been struck by it as I am. The Religion of the Divine Law comprehends the institutions of Priesthood, Sacrifice, Atonement, Purification, Prayers and Supplications. It gives us the history of Divine judgements, miraculous interpositions, sacred commemorations, and communications between GOD and Man. These are the doctrines which distinguish the Religion of the Bible: and we meet with them all in the Religion of the Heathens. For in the first place, Heathens had priests. A priest is one of the first remarkable persons we meet with in the Iliad of Homer: and he appears under a very respectable

character. He is not a minister appointed by the people : that absurdity was not then thought of. He is under the appointment and protection of a Deity ; he wears the insignia of his power ; and is seconded in a miraculous way by his interposition. The character is not given to him by halves. No Heathens were what we now call Low Churchmen : they carried things to such a height on the contrary part, that I wonder Infidels do not burn their books for teaching Tory principles, and bearing such testimony against themselves.

Now let any man ask himself the question— How Heathens ever came to think of such a thing as a priest ? a minister appointed by Heaven, to officiate between God and Man in holy things ? I say in holy things ; for this is the reason of the name both in Greek and Latin. Ἱερεὺς is from Ἱερὸς, *sacred* ; and *sacerdos* in Latin from *sacer*. They never would, they never could, have thought of this, unless a priest had been first appointed by the true GOD. We go back to the times, when all the earth was of one religion : from which times, the Heathens began to carry off what we find amongst them. The fact is in no other way to be accounted for. Did Nature ever invent a priest ? The men of Nature, the Deists, abhor the idea : they are gentlemen who can do every thing for themselves :

themselves : they even look upon a Bishop at this day, not as an object of reverence, but of scorn and mockery ; and call his ministry juggling and conjuring. In bringing things to this pass, Infidels have acted very unfairly : and indeed no man who knows them would expect any honesty from them. They have taken advantage of the forms and fopperies of Popery ; as if Christianity had been nothing till the Papists had spoilt it. What would Voltaire have done, if he could not have played on Popish abuses, to make the character of a priest ridiculous ? But if he had lived in other times, and had argued against the Heathen priests as he did against the Christians, the Heathens would have put him to death : perhaps they would have flayed him alive : they would not have crowned him with roses, and set up his image in their temples. They were mad enough in many things ; but not so mad as that. Such acts were reserved for the time when Christians should run mad.

The case is then plain concerning the origin of priesthood. It must have come either from God, or from Nature, or from Tradition. From Nature it could not come ; not a Deist in the nation will pretend it. If it came from tradition, that tradition must have had some true original ;

and this is but another way of saying that it came from God.

What we say of priesthood, we must say of sacrifice: they are relative terms: and one is nothing without the other: for in the one we have the minister, and in the other the ministry. And here we shall ask the same question as before. Did Nature think of sacrifice as a duty? Never. She pronounces it to be folly.

— moritur cur victima pro te?

Stultitia est.

Is it possible for reason to conclude, that the Creator can be pleased with the destruction of his creatures? Can a guilty person become less guilty by adding one offence to another? Here some consideration must be admitted, which does violence to natural reason: and this is, the doctrine of man's fall into a sinful state: for without this the whole is an absurdity: it is an effect without a cause. To suppose sacrifice is to suppose sin: and the heathen practice bears universal testimony to it: so that our Infidels have another reason for burning their heathen books. I grant that, when the Heathens themselves reasoned about it, they said many foolish things; nevertheless, the fact

fact is what I insist upon. Some of them thought that animals were offered in sacrifice on a principle of revenge, because they did mischief. This might be a reason for killing them, but no reason for offering them to God by a religious act. The question still recurs, how came they to imagine that this could be an act of devotion, acceptable to God? Is the Creator revengeful, because we are so? Is he spiteful to poor creatures for being such as he made them? Yet in this foolish manner did some of them argue, when they had lost the primary intention: they then thought this to be the original:

Prima putatur
 Hostia sus meruisse mori, quia semina pando
 Eruerit rostro, spemque interceperit anni.

OVID, lib. xv.

But then they perceived, that not the most hurtful, but the most harmless creatures were chiefly condemned to this use; which, being contrary to the other practice, makes it senseless and absurd.

Victima labe carens, et præstantissima formâ,
 (Nam placuisse nocet).

This reason is in point against the other: for here the victim is to be the most perfect of an harmless kind:

Quid meruere boves? animal sine fraude dolisque:—

Quid meruistis oves, placidum pecus, &c.

When people talk and give reasons in ignorance, they are sure to betray themselves by talking inconsistently. The latter distinction, of which we speak, is agreeable to the Divine Law, and leads to the doctrine of atonement: a victim *without spot or blemish* was required, with great propriety. When Heathens offered unclean animals, such as dogs and swine, I am not clear whether they meant it as an affront to the Mosaic distinction, or whether they judged impure victims more acceptable to their impure deities. How deplorable does human reason appear, when it departs from the true God! departs from the true God into darkness, and then falls to giving its reasons! Here the wise man makes a worse figure than the idiot. The Christian, who looks with his eyes open into the regions of Heathenism, will often shake his head with pity, as a sober man when he looks into Bedlam. The more the Heathens

thens were in the dark about this affair, so much the better for my plan: for, if they practised what they did not understand, it is evident, that the practice was not the result of any reasoning of their own, but that it was received from authority. The more we reflect on this, the more we shall be persuaded of it: for nothing but authority will make a wise man practise what he does not understand: and, if it came from authority, that brings us at once to the point I am aiming at.

Sacrifices, according to the Scripture, were used in different capacities; as expiations, purifications, and preparatives to divine inspiration *: To *expiate* is to do away sin by an act of piety; the great act of piety, the offering of a sacrifice; from whence piety takes its name: and it was never thought, from the days of Cain and Abel, that there could be such a thing as piety to God without sacrifice. And the same holds good to this day. He that does not offer to God some sacrifice, is not *pious*, but *impious*: his prayers are an abomination. But how could such a persuasion enter the heart of man, otherwise than by Revelation from God? No man could think that the shedding of innocent blood would take away sin,

* They were used, as we shall see, under the same capacities among the Heathens.

unless

unless he had been originally told so on unexceptionable authority* : so that the very existence of such a thing in the world is sufficient to prove that it came from Revelation : and divines think with good reason that it came in with the first promise in paradise—“ the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.”

Sacrifices had also the name of purifications with the Heathens: they were called *καθάρισμα*, because they took away the foulness of guilt, and purged the conscience from the sense of sin. But, besides this, they were certainly used as preparatives to divine inspiration. Balaam offered seven bullocks and seven rams before he began his prophesy. And it is remarkable, that the priestess in Virgil, before she prophesies, prescribes the same animals, and in the same number.

Nunc grege de intacto septem mactare juvencos
Præstiterit, totidem lectas de more bidentes.

Lib. vi. 38.

The coincidence is here very remarkable, and must have been derived from the highest antiquity.

* They never would have injured themselves so much in their *property* as to offer sacrifice, more especially when they offered hecatombs at once.

But

But the false priests resembled the true in another part of their office, beside that of offering sacrifice. A priest was not only called *Iēpeūs*, from his being concerned in holy offerings: he was also called *ἀργιληρ*, an intercessor, *παρος το αργιληρου*, *δ εξιν ευχεσθαι*, from his offering prayers in behalf of the people: and it was accounted a great offence for the people to dishonour their intercessor; and Homer tells us how the Greeks suffered for it.

Ablutions or baptisms were prescribed, in the Divine Law, as necessary to wash away the impurity contracted by offending against it: particularly in the case of those who touched the body of the slain: and even to this day washing with water is the outward sign of the washing away of sin *: and it was necessary that the water used for sacred purposes should be living water; that is, not stagnant, but running water. These ablutions were common among the Heathens, and the water was of the same sort applied on various occasions. In the case of *Æneas*, we have nearly the whole doctrine. Having been defiled among the slain, he declares himself unfit to meddle with holy

* Pilate, an Heathen, washed his hands, to signify that his conscience was clear of guilt.

things,

things, till he had washed his body with living water,

— — — — — Donec me flumine vivo
Abluero *.

The articles of wine, flour, cakes, oil, honey, incense, salt, were all used by Heathens as in the law of Moses; insomuch, that I heard it once observed by a learned man, to whom I looked up for much information when I was young, that even Homer alone, in the circumstantial of sacrifice, would nearly furnish us with the particulars of the Levitical ritual.

But it is time now to consider, that the rites of worship require a place wherein they are to be performed. In the Scripture this place was called the tabernacle or temple, into which it was commanded that offerings of every kind should be brought. The Heathens also had their temples, and they were almost as numerous as their deities. In these their sacrifices were offered; and I suppose Ἰερεῖον, a victim, to have been so called from Ἰερὸν, a temple: because it was the chief offering

* The same occurs in Homer.

Χερσὶ δ' αἰπλοσιν Δῖι λέιβειν αἴθοπα σίνοι

Ἄξομαις ἐδέ πή ἐτι κελανεφές Κρονίων

Αἴματις καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένου εὐχείσασθαι. §. 267.

made in that place. They affected a division in their temples similar to that of the Jewish temple ; as that had a secret place called the Holy of Holies, so had they their adyta, with tri-pods and cortynæ, and other furniture, where the oracles were delivered. As to the oracles themselves, I care not what they were : they might be false in their matter, or false in their author ; all I say is this, that there never would have been a false oracle, unless there had been a true one. And the same may be said of dreams ; which was another mode of divine revelation ; and another name for a prophet was a dreamer of dreams. The same character we find in Homer*, on occasion of the Greeks desiring to know the reason why they were visited with a plague.

Ἄλλ' αὐτεὶ δῆ τινα μάντιν ἐρείσομεν, οὐδὲρῆς
Ἡ καὶ ὄνειροπόλον (καὶ γάρ τοντας ἐν Διόθετιν).

I might collect many other circumstantialis relating to offerings, purifications, and ablutions ; but what I have mentioned seem to me of principal consideration. But there is one custom of very high antiquity, which ought not to be forgotten. We read that the Father of the Faithful offered to Melchizedech, as the priest of God,

* And under both the names of μάντις and ὄνειροπόλος.

the tenths of the spoils he had taken in war. This we find to have been the practice with Heathens ; who also paid tenths to their kings, for religious uses. Florus tells us, that the Romans sent the tenths of the spoils they had taken, after a ten year's siege, to Apollo Pythius. Lib. i. cap. 12.

As we read of many signal judgements in the Scriptures ; so there was an universal opinion, that the Gods visited the sins of men, and had been known to have done it personally. But, instead of searching for particulars, I shall speak of one instance, which might stand for all the rest ; and this is the destruction of the world by a flood. The testimony of Ovid is so well known, that it need not be repeated ; but the fact is attested by the Greeks as well as the Latins. They relate, that the present race of wicked men are not the first that were upon earth ; for that there were a former race, who all perished ; and that the present race came from Deucalion, a man who survived the flood, by entering into an ark with his family, and all kinds of living creatures, none of which hurt him : that this fact was annually

* Josephus gives many examples from Heathens in his Antiquities.

commemorated

commemorated at the temple of Juno, in Syria, a temple said to have been originally built in commemoration of the flood. All this may be found in Lucian's Treatise *de Dea Syria*, quoted by Grotius, lib. i. 16. Mr. Bryant has taken great pains to show, in his *Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, what foundation the Arkite ceremonies of the Heathens had in Divine Revelation. For this he has met with his due praise: but it is much to be regretted, that when he had so fair an opportunity, he did not also shew, that other ceremonies of their religious worship had the same foundation, and bore their testimony to the same authority. I believe it may be said with truth that there never was a single rite in general use among Heathens which was not founded in Revelation*. Mr. Bryant would then have done what the learned Dr. Spencer ought to have done when he did exactly the contrary. He preposterously deduced the rites of the Hebrews from the rites of the Heathens; and so produced a work of learned appearance, and composed in elegant Latin, but disgraceful to Christian Divinity, dishonourable to the Church of England, and affording a very bad example to vain scholars who should succeed him. The Hebrew rites, he

* And so far as their rites differed, they were corruption; as when they offered unclean animals in sacrifice.

contends,

contends, were derived from the Heathen rites. But this position laid him under an obligation which he did not foresee: for the Heathen religion, like that of the Hebrews, abounded also with *miracles*. Did the Hebrews derive their miracles also from the miracles of the Heathens? This one question, to my apprehension, makes nonsense of his whole scheme. The true Religion had its miracles. Its miracles were the credentials of its doctrines. Those who professed that religion believed and knew them to be true, because their eyes had seen them. This their Heathen enemies knew; and, resolving not to be behind them, overacted the part, and multiplied miracles to such a degree, that they became fulsome and ridiculous: and here we shall find the true reason why they so universally hated the nation of the Jews. When a man is a plagiary, he either hides the original out of which he borrows, or represents it as worthless and contemptible. When boys are taught to read Heathen historians, they find so much of this miracle-making, that they wonder not at it. But it is a wonderful thing; and they should stop to think about it: for how came Heathens to dream of such things as miracles? No man could dream of a thunder-storm, unless he had heard one. The reason of an Infidel, in these days, tells him there can be no such thing as a miracle. But the man who says this, must

must give us a reason why they were so universally received among the Heathens. Dr. Middleton would reason *upwards*, from the legendary miracles of the Papists, to the Apostolical miracles of Christianity, and conclude them all legendary: but we will reason *down* to them, and make the false prove the true; for the false would never have existed, but for the true, which made way for them.

Is any man so weak as to think, that base money came into use before true money? That the shadow was made first, and the substance afterwards? Ridiculous! Heathens knew that there had been true miracles wrought by the true GOD for his people; therefore they never questioned the reality of miracles—they knew too well—and feeling it a defect and disgrace to them, that they had no miracles of their own to support them, they fabricated them in such abundance, that the Heathen Celsus impudently argued, that the miracles of the Scripture were borrowed from the miracles of their mythology. But what can our poor modern Infidel say? the weight of the evidence, profane and sacred, for the existence of miracles, is so great on both sides, that between them he is crushed to death: his scheme cannot last a moment. If the philosopher Hume's arguments against miracles had then been produced, they would have made a

wretched figure ; though Christians may be so bewitched as to listen to them, the Heathens themselves would have cast them out. This is a strange case, and it shews us that no man can rightly judge of the enemies of God, till he compares them with one another ; and then he will see how senseless they are. Truth being one, the friends of God are alike in all ages : but error being various, and never able to fix its foot any where, produces nothing but inconsistent characters. *When all the kings west of Jordan, and all the Canaanites, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, then their heart melted ; neither was there spirit in them any more.* Thus it was then ; now, indeed, the time is remote, the thing is pronounced impossible, and the fact itself is denied : but Mr. Leslie's argument sets all that to rights. The Heathens of Canaan knew that there was a power which wrought true miracles for the people of God ; and the corresponding society of Heathens would communicate it to one another, and never forget it afterwards : the report went down to their posterities ; and nothing remained, but to make as many miracles as they could of their own, in order to maintain the credit of their false deities * ; and

* Cadmus very likely brought a great deal of this knowledge into Greece.

their

their universal practice is a demonstration of miracles that were true. Every boy that reads Livy, or Florus, or Homer, or Virgil, will see how universally miracles were admitted among the Heathens. What they were I care not: I am contented with knowing, that there never was a shadow without a substance; and that there is not an Infidel upon earth who can speak sense upon this subject. How far Satan might sometimes interfere, to make Heathen prodigies real, I do not inquire now: because the Infidel will not chuse to come off that way. The supposition would be fatal: for then the Devil, who deluded Heathens, may delude him. There was a time when he deceived the world, by shewing himself openly: for God then shewed himself openly; but the same end is answered now by hiding himself: though his works betray him to Christians, and ever will, as effectually as if they saw him acting in person.

If the Bible describes or predicts the appearance of divine persons upon earth, say not the Heathens the same? We are stunned with the exploits of the sons of their Gods and Goddesses. Achilles, the hero of Homer, is like the HERO first predicted in the book of Genesis, vulnerable only in the heel. If we read that heavenly beings are visible to some and not to others, we find the

like in Homer, as when Minerva comes to Achilles from Heaven :

Οἴω φαινομένη, τῶν δ' ἀλλῶν ἔτις ἵρατο.

She appears to him alone, while nobody else could see her. See Daniel, x. 7.

If we read of beasts speaking with human voice, we find the same in Virgil *.

— — — — — pecudesque locutæ.

In short, there is scarcely a sign or a wonder recorded in the Bible, but we find something of the same sort in the history which the Heathens give of themselves, and their gods ; even to the restoring the dead to life ; it being told of Jupiter, that he restored Pelops, who had been slaughtered by his father. It seems more remarkable that they should borrow the wonders of the Sacred History, than that they should use the same ceremonies in their religion : for, when they undertook to set up a religion against God, they round themselves baffled and discomfited in their first attempt ; they had nothing to begin with, and so were under the necessity of taking such rites as they found, and changing the application of them to false objects, to make it answer their

* Some of these things I noted long ago, in *Letters from a Tutor to his Pupils.*

wicked purpose. Thus it came to pass, that although they abhorred the Jews for denying their Gods; they all used the same rites of divine worship : which is a prodigious fact ; but we are so early accustomed to it, that it does not strike us.

But I think we may go a step farther : for, though it may seem strange to say it, yet learned men have thought, with good reason, that even the false objects which the Heathens worshipped were taken from Revelation ; for God, being an invisible spirit, could never be known to men from the beginning of the world, but through the emblematic visible powers of nature ; particularly by the power of fire, which attended his presence in Egypt, at the burning bush, then in the Red Sea, and afterwards at Mount Horeb, when the law was delivered. All this while, the spirit of God, thus represented, was invisible ; consequently an object of faith. This they lost, having their reasons for not retaining it in their minds, and took the visible fire of Nature for the true object, when it was nothing but the figure. Mr. Bryant, in his *History of Mythology*, shews abundantly, that fire was the first and great object of antient idolatry all over the world : and the fire of the natural world being the Sun, they made him the standing object of adoration.

And

And Macrobius, a very learned Heathen, has a long chapter, in which he attempts (but over-strains the point) to reduce all the Gods of Heathenism to the Sun, which the Scripture itself uses as an emblem of HIM, in whom there is no darkness. So that, upon the whole, if we examine Heathenism, and turn it about on every side, it answers the purpose of my argument, and gives never-failing testimony to an original Revelation. There was absolutely nothing original in Heathens, but only that rebellious wickedness, which turned every thing to a wrong use. They invented little; but abused every thing.

These sacrifices, which were originally offered to God, they offered to impure, revengeful, cruel, beings, whom the Apostle calls devils; who were never content, in any part of the world, without human sacrifices. Wherever was Heathenism, there was human sacrifice, which must have been derived from a knowledge, that man was to atone for man; not only the antient Molochians, but the more polished Greeks and Romans. Homer, at the death of Patroclus, and Virgil, at the funeral of Pallas. The act of Q. Curtius most probably proceeded from the same idea, that one man must perish for the redemption of others.

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Their objects, the elements, which were innocent as they stand in Scripture, were abominable and detestable, when taken for realities ; and Mr. Bryant hath shewn how the plagues of Egypt were generally aimed at the false objects of Heathen worship : but the author of the Book of Wisdom had told us the same long before : “ for look for what things they “ grudged, when they were punished, that is, for “ them whom they thought to be gods ; now being “ punished in them, when they saw it, they ac- “ knowledged him to be the true God, whom they “ before denied to know, and therefore came ex- “ treme damnation upon them.” Wisd. xii. 27.

From all that has been said, I have two inferences to make.

I. That, if Heathen books give this testimony to Divine Revelation, we should use them for the best end they are capable of answering, the confirmation of our own faith. They will never draw us away from God, if we understand what Heathenism is, and whence it came ; nor should we ever omit to take advantage of it, in our arguments against Infidels. Thus it will answer a purpose contrary to its intention and nature ; it will confirm what it was intended to confound : as when “ out of the eater came forth meat : ” and it

will

will be happy for us, if our teachers of youth will give them such hints occasionally, as will acquaint them with this use of it. We shall not then be long under the dominion of profligate scholars, who use their heathen learning for no end, but as an instrument of evil, to corrupt and destroy the Christian world ; increasing all that misery daily, which abounds too much already.

II. I would also recommend, that the deplorable consequences of a departure from the true GOD should be pointed out to all school-boys, as the Apostle has displayed them in the first chapter to the Romans : which was extended as a warning against the corruptions of Heathenism, and should never be forgotten to the end of the world. It is full as necessary now, as when the Apostle wrote it. For these times have now brought us about to a parallel apostasy in the French nation ; worse in its guilt than the original departure to Heathenism ; and, I believe, worse in its fruits. All that the apostle has said of the antient Heathens and their abominable morals may now be applied to the French, in whom it is fully verified, so that they are become the very pests of the earth, and their metropolis, in the literal sense of the words, a second SODOM. Heathenism will be no source of corruption to Christians, who, with their eyes open,

open, remember the dreadful effects of it of old, and see the consequences of it now : from which may GOD defend all those young men, who are now on the road to a learned education ! and in this prayer, I am confident you, Reverend Sir, will most heartily join with

Your faithful and
obedient humble Servant,

WILLIAM JONES.

*Nayland,
March 3, 1799.*

Finalization

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1922. 1. 17.